



The Iranian Diplomatic Mission and the Spread of Shiism in Ghana

Mohammed Hashiru*

MPhil Student, Sakarya University, Sakarya, Turkey

Email: hashirumohammed@gmail.com

Abstract

This article is produced from a thesis written on the foreign policy of Iran and the spread Ideology: the case of Iran in Ghana (1979-2016). This aspect of the thesis throws light on the role of the Iranian embassy in spreading the Shia ideology in other words Shiism in Ghana. The diplomatic relations between the Ghanaian state and the Islamic Republic as well as the activities of the diplomatic corps of Iran in spreading the Shia ideology are carefully studies. The research finds that several measures pursued by the Iranian diplomatic corps in spreading Shiism are interconnected with the functions of both the embassy and the cultural consulate. Unlike in other states, the Ghanaian state due to its secular nature is responding well to the Iranian agenda as the representing state make relentless effort to increase its soft power in the host state.

Keywords: Ghana; Iran; Embassy; Shiism; Ideology; Foreign policy

1. Introduction

Shiism is an Islamic sect which emerged after the demise of the Prophet of Islam and became an organized political institution in Islam after the Battle of Siffin. Shiism became the new identity of those who expressed loyalty to Ali. It was this political allegiance that later culminated into a religious doctrine.

* Corresponding author.

These people were hence referred to as Shiites. In the course of time Shiism got divided into groups such the Ismailiyah, Zaydiyya and the Imamiyya (Ithna Ashariyya). The Imamiyya is today, the most active and populous Shiite group in the world. This is partially because Iran as a state is a custodian of this dominant group and are advancing several measures to spread this brand throughout the world [1].

Since the Arabs from the west invaded Iran in the 7th century AD, Islam was hence introduced to the new invaded land [2]. In the early 16th century, the Safavids converted the majority of the Persians to Shia Islam. Under the Qajar Dynasty (1795-1925) Shia Muslims formed the majority of the country. Ever since, the Shia religious establishment especially the Ayatollahs were very instrumental in various rebellions movements such as the protest movement of 1890-1891, the constitutional revolution of 1905-1911, the oil nationalization crisis of 1951-1953 up to the grand Islamic Revolution of 1979 [3].

The 1979 revolution brought many changes which includes the institutionalization of the clerically dominated Islamic republic and the political and social establishment of the revolution. After 1979, political power structure became centralized and materialized. The Shia clericals rose from a diffuse religious and socio-political force to a powerful and organized body having a formalized hierarchy, an educational apparatus that is strong and an influential political and religious network. This transformation did not end with an organizational aspect of religious institutions but sailed through religious teachings and doctrines. The fact that Islam was the Corner stone of the revolution also led to the sanctification of the state and the constitution [4]

Political elites such as Ali Shari'ati and Imam Khomeini are mostly referred to as the main ideologues behind the political struggle that led to the 1979 revolution. Following the death of Ali Shari'ati in 1977, Khomeini became the main political player to champion the revolutionary course. His political philosophy hence became the state's political philosophy. Khomeini's rulership philosophy is contained in a series of lectures published in 1971 as a book. This book is called *Vilayet-i-faqih* [5]. *Vilayet-i-Faqih*: The core message of the book is that religion and state should not be separated and that the jurist should be the custodians of absolute political power to be able to manage the affairs of the state based on Quran and Sunnah. Khomeini saw the 1979 revolution as a beginning of Islamic era. The book was also a handbook for the revolution. The spiritual leader argued in the book that an Islamic state based on the Quran and Prophet's traditions could be created and also religious men due to their knowledge of law must be in helm of affairs of the state. While shunning and condemning the monarchical system of government Khomeini called for the overthrow of the Shah's regime as he proposes the creation of parallel Islamic government that will incite the population to stand against tyranny and injustice. The spiritual leaders program drew an attention of many supporters as the revolution gained momentum [5].

Despite the immense support received by Khomeini's *Vilayet al Faqih*, several other pundits and scholars stood against the law. One of such critics of Khomeini Ironically was his ardent supporters, Maghniya. According to Maghniya, the position of the Jurist guardian is virtually equated to the position of the infallible Imam. He argues that the faqih has the mandate extracting religious rules from the sources for new event in a form comprehensible to the people, but has no superiority over his predecessor. The faqih being a mortal is liable to

be conceited, mistaken or forgetful has the competence and the duty to be the guardian of certain areas of social life and all categories of Muslims [6].

Many writers and experts of Iranian policies since the revolution have mentioned that promoting and spreading the revolutionary Islam was primarily the foreign policy objective of Iran since the beginning of 1979. By unity, it aims at uniting the Islamic world and the extension of sovereignty of God throughout the world. The Muslims of the calf state and beyond were appealed by the broadcast of Iran's "voice of the Islamic Revolution" "to rise up against their states [7].

Activities of Khomeini in his bid to export the revolution, however, made a number of Muslim governments nervous. In Iraq for instant, where 60% of the population is Shia, the Baath Socialist government of Saddam Hussein was disturbed by eruption in Karbala, Khufa and Najd. Sadam and Khomeini have both shown distaste for each other. While Sadam denounces Khomeini, Khomeini also condemned Saddam as an atheist and called for his overthrow. The offshoots of the Iranian party supporters in Iraq such as Ayatollah Sadr were executed in 1980 as a result.

2. Theoretical Framework

Following the 1979 revolution of the Islamic Republic of Iran the national identity of Iranians became a topic for discussions. Shiism eventually became the social identity of the Iranians. Some intellectuals have maintained that three elements make up the national identity of Iranians. These are Pan Islamism, Pan Iranism and modernism. Pan-Islamism or Pan Shiism emphasizes on political Islam that enjoins all Muslims to strive against oppression. It was Shiism that aided the national identity of the Iranians. Shiism therefore becomes the source of identity formation of the state which informs its foreign and domestic actions. Pan-Iranism is the assertion that Iranian state and nationality is the major reference of the state's national identity. The philosophy of the Iranian state since beginning of the state's foundation regards human's identity as a fact. The Zoroastrian culture of the state enjoins humans to not only fight darkness but make endless endeavor to deny it from dominating the earth. Following the integration of Shia Islam and its declaration as a state religion of Iran, Shiites were commanded to strive against oppression as they stand in defense of the oppressed.

Through nationalism inspired by culture and identity the Islamic Republic of Iran seek to create a new order in the state and also attempts to change the Muslim world as well as the developing countries. The constitution of the Islamic Republic institutionalized the Shia ideological agenda as it legalizes the achievement of such goals through the usage of its foreign policy. The 1979 revolution redefined both the domestic and foreign policy of the state. Pan-shiism and nationalism have since remained components of the foreign policy of Iran. Whilst the component of language nationalism is ethnicity and culture, the components of Pan-Islamism or Pan-shiism is global ideology which export it to other states. Since constructivism among other theories of international relations is a theory which gives relevance to identity as a factor which shapes domestic and international politics, the most appropriate theoretical framework of this study is constructivism.

3. The Foreign Policy of Iran and Shiism Spread

According to Mirbaghari [8], accounting for the impact of Shiism on the foreign policy of Iran involves a review of its impact on domestic politics in Iran. This work is interested in the foreign policy of Iran and the spread of Shiism since 1979. Eva Patricia Raket writes that

“post-revolutionary Iran’s foreign policy approach can be summarized as follows: in the first ten years after the revolution, when Khomeini was the Supreme leader, it was dominated by two main ideological principles: 1. Neither East nor West but the Islamic Republic, “which translated in Particular into an aversion to Western (US) influence; and 2. “Export of the revolution” in other to free Muslim countries and non-Muslim countries from their oppressive and corruptive rulers” [9]

This means that during the first ten years after the revolution, foreign policy orientation was mainly driven by ideology. The presidency of Rafsanjani (1989-1997) witnessed an approach towards post Iran-Iraq war economic reconstruction and the reintegration of the country into the international economy. Rafsanjani’s main priority with regards to foreign policy was the improvement of Iran’s relations with Persian Gulf, especially Saudi Arabia and the newly independent states of Central Eurasia and Russia. Between 1997 and 2005, Khomeini also aimed to proceed with Rafsanjani’s foreign policy towards its neighbors in addition to improving relations with the European Union and its member countries. Raket observes that Shia ideological doctrine even during these two presidencies was fixed in a nationalist yearning that rejects Westernization of the country and the Iranian people. Ahmadinejad’s presidency was characterized by a more hostile attitude towards the West and Israel. It was Ahmadinejad who became the first Iranian president to pay a courtesy call on Egypt since 1979. His visit to Cairo and the meeting with the leading Sunni Muslims scholar sheikh Ahmed al Tayeb was interpreted to have a religious connotation [10].

According to Fakhreddin Soltani [11], the Islamic Republic of Iran has pursued several policies since its 1979 revolution in order to achieve its goals. The goal of the Islamic Republic had been dangling between the interest of the state and the interest of the Islamic world. Principles of Islam have dominated the foreign policy of Iran; however, different conditions have compelled the government to change its priorities of foreign policy. For instance, article 154 of the constitution states that “the Islamic Republic of Iran is concerned with the welfare of humanity as a whole and takes independence, liberty and sovereignty of justice and righteousness as the right of people in the world” [7]. Ramazani also notes that the constitutional demand for spreading and realizing this goal shapes the Iranian foreign policy since the 1979 revolution. The diverse actors employed by the Iranian state in its quest to fulfil its constitutional mandate is the soldiers, other liberation movements, students, athletes, foreign clergy and diplomats [7].

Practically there have been four theoretical approaches of Iranian foreign policy since 1979. These include realist, ideological, pragmatist and reformist approaches [11]. Mehdi Barzagaan started the realist approach where Iran foreign policy was based on national interest and not ideological priorities. This approach, which tries to respect international regularities by avoiding interventionist policy in other countries in order to improve the state’s relation with others failed because the differences in attitude of Barzagaan and Khomeini.

The ideological approach was dominant in the Iranian foreign policy between 1981 and 1989. This approach has it that foreign policies must be built on principles and assumptions of Islam. This meant that politicians and decision makers had to behave within the tenets of ideological values. Proponents of this approach hoped that they will be able to spread the assumptions of Islamic Revolution of Iran in other countries. Proponents of these assumptions followed the interventionist approach. This approach, however, gave birth to hostility between the Islamic Republic and other countries especially Persian Gulf states.

Hashem Rafsanjani, between the years 1989-1997 pursued the pragmatic approach. By this approach, Iran endeavored to reconstruct post War-Iran, in order to normalize its relations with other states. The state declared its willing to respect international regularities and organizations. The eight years of Hashem Rafsanjani was characterized by geographical necessities that gave less attention to ideological assumptions.

The reformist approach also had some similarities with the pragmatist approach. It is only that it has political differences in domestic affairs. Khatami from 1997 until 2005 followed the reformist approach. Domestically, values such as civil society, freedom of speech, rule of law and pluralism were adhered to by politicians. The state tried to improve its reputation in international society. During this period, the Iranian foreign policy was dialogue and peaceful co-exist with other countries. Mahmood Ahmadinejad's foreign policy, however, was considered a flashback to the principles and values of early years of the Islamic state. He criticized the status quo of the international state. Ahmadinejad declared that "Islamic Republic of Iran will never withdraw from goals of Islamic revolution and will respond to schemes of West and East" [11].

A careful study of the political trends and policies of the Islamic Republic reveals that Shiism, despite the approach used by past and present leadership is an influential factor in Iran's foreign policy. Rakeel has mentioned that the main bodies responsible for the conduct of foreign policy are the supreme leadership, the presidency, the council of the Guardian and the foreign minister, the SNSC and the majles. Decision making processes goes through the foreign minister, to the president and then to the SNSC and finally endorsed by the Supreme Leader [9].

According to [12], the Supreme leader has the final on matters of foreign policy decision-making. As far as the Islamic Republic of Iran is concerned information gathered from abroad from embassies of Iran, security agents, media sources, libraries, individual citizens of other countries, scholars think tanks, cultural attachés of the Islamic culture and communications organization (ICRO) is the source for foreign policy development. Spreading the revolution since 1979 was a top priority of the Islamic state. The export of the revolution was under the principle "Neither East nor West" [13] mentions that not all the aspects of Iran's foreign policy shows this motto.

4. The Diplomatic Relations between Ghana and Iran

Ghana's foreign Ministry has it that the there was no significant relations between Iran (Persian Empire) and the Ghanaian state until the Khomeini led revolution. Following the revolution of the Persian Empire and the consequent change of its name to the Islamic Republic, diplomatic relations between the two states commenced.

The Ghanaian state started its relations with the Islamic Republic in the year 1979. Both hosting and sending representatives were appointed in 1979 by both States. However, the Ghanaian states due to a general cost cutting exercise closed down its mission in the Islamic Republic in 1984 [14]

The Ghana-Iran Joint Commission is one of the most important machinery of bilateral cooperation which transpires between the two states. The Joint commission was inaugurated in November 1990 and was reactivated in reactivated in June 2002 subsequently. Kamal Kjianazzi, the then Iranian Foreign Minister, in March 2004 visited Ghana and made a contribution towards development of the Ghana state with an amount of \$1.5 million. Also, the two states signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Development Assistance. The agreement aimed at facilitating commercial exchanges between the two countries. Moreover, according to the Ministry of Foreign affairs Ghana continues to enjoy benefits in areas of agriculture, health, education and culture from the Islamic Republic. The major and prominent Iranian institutions which facilitate economic cooperation in Ghana are the Agriculture and Rural Development (ARD), the Islamic university college, Ghana and the Red Crescent society among others.

Though the aim was to ensure trade between the two states, the agreement signed between the states in 2002 indicates the Islamic Republic of Iran is favored by the balance of trade. The direction and trend of exports as well as imports between the two states is an evident of balance of trade in favor of the Islamic Republic between 2002 and 2003. The Iranian state pushed more resources into the Ghanaian economy whereas the Ghanaian economy registered zero investment in Iran [14]. Ghana-Iran Services Ltd, Kleen Export Company Ltd and AEM industrial Company Ltd are among the companies which have seized the opportunity of the agreement to explore the Ghanaian market. Information at the Ministry of foreign Affairs has it that Ghana previously signed oil agreement which includes the importation of 500,000 barrels of crude oil from the Islamic Republic. Helping by cooperating with the Ghanaian state to refine and explore oil and gas as well as gold was also an integral part of the Ghana-Iran agreement.

The relations of Ghana Iran improved not without the contribution of some Ghanaian Muslim personalities. Though the two states handled their relations diplomatically at states level, activities of some Muslim personalities have also aided in improving it. Both [15] and [16] have mentioned that Abdul Salam Abdul Hamid Bansi, who founded the Shiite community in Ghana, is the foremost Ghana Muslim whose activities aided the relationship between the two states. The Shia pundit upon his graduation from an Iranian higher institution in 1988 has made contacts with the Iranians for which reason the Shiite community was born. And since Shiism spreading Shiism has been part of the Iranian foreign policy, the Iranian diplomatic corps joined forces with the local Shiite pundit. Though their activities were geared towards looking for space for Shiites to operate in the Ghanaian State, it improved the relations between Ghana and Iran. This Shia pundit created a religious constituency in Ghana which continues to serve as the tie of religious relations between some Ghanaian Muslims and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

[16] observes that the intertwined nature of the Iranian Islam with political orientation formed part of the identity of the followers of this new Islamic orientation in Ghana. The activities of the Iranian NGOs also helped in the improvement of Ghana-Iran relations. These NGOs serve as a tunnel through which the relation between

Ghana and Iran manifests. This is because the NGOs have always had one two connections with the Iranian embassy or consulate. Imam Hussein Foundation established in 1988 by the first leader of the Shiite community, Abdul Salam Bansi. This NGO aims at distributing Shiite literature in the Muslim community.

5. Iranian Diplomats and the Spread of Shiism in Ghana

Diplomatic mission represents an important function in the international system of states. Despite the fact that diplomacy can be achieved by other means, the ambassador or charge d'affaires is greatly useful in the management of relations between states as well as between states and other actors [17]

Accordingly, via diplomatic mission, states pursue their political and economic interests. They also negotiate, co-ordinate as well as solve problems on behalf of their states. They gather research and gather publicly available information. It can be deduced and understood from the sentence that information gathering as well as ensuring the safety and welfare of the embassies citizens diaspora is as well crucial. So, if a misconception that goes against the tenets and aims of the sending mission is spread or if its citizens engage in acts that defames the states (both host and sending) it is apparently the responsibility of the embassy to act properly on behalf of its state to rectify it. However, if the embassy which is acting on behalf of its nation remains unconcerned about it, it would not be appropriate to accuse it of inciting it. Since the embassy represents the goals and aspiration of the state as well as the policies it has in place for the hosting embassy, their actions in the country they operate in are very crucial to their states.

In some cases, some states make use of their embassies to spread and advocate their ideologies in the hosting states. Like Mussolini, some embassies or diplomatic missions, during the Italian fascist era were used to spread fascism. Italians in diaspora did not only organize themselves with the motive of spreading the fascist ideology but also, the diplomatic missions of Italy supported them in spreading it. In Senegal for instance, Leichtman [18] notes there was no Shiite representation until the founding of the Lebanese Islamic Institute in 1978. The goal was not only to restore religious identity to Lebanese Muslims but also to guide the theological development as well as the numerical growth of newly converting Senegalese Shiites. The leader Shaikh El-Zein hid his goal and was supported and given help by the Iranian embassy. According to Leichtman, during the time of the Shah the embassy operated and was closed subsequently in 1984 due to the spread of propaganda. In 1990s however it was reopened and it continued more subtly to promote Shiism. It is remarked by the researcher also that both the Iranian embassy and the Lebanese Shaikh worked hand in hand to ensure the spread of Shiism. It is worth nothing however that tensions and dispute among states cannot only deteriorate the relationship of two states but also can lead to the closure of the sending state embassy, or the hosting state embassy or better still both states embassies and diplomatic missions. For instance, circumstances that lead to the closure of the Iranian embassy in 1984 were related to the spread of Islamic propaganda by the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Also in 2009, Morocco severed ties with Iran and led to the eventual closure of the Iranian embassy in the hosting country. This was largely influenced by what the regime referred to as "Shia ideology threat". Morocco accused Iran of using its embassy to spread Shiism in the country. The spread, Morocco government distorts and interferes with the countries ideology. Though a Sunni dominated Arab country would not tolerate such an

infiltration, the most important thing here is, the regimes use of its embassy to achieve its hidden goal [19]. Though Iran has always dismissed claims its regime is using its diplomatic missions to spread Shia ideology, remnants of the opposite seem evidence.

Also, in Comoros, the regime suffered yet another diplomatic dispute when President Othman Ghazali ordered the closure of all Iranian offices and organizations in the country. According to the government of Comoros, the Iranian organizations were spreading and extending the Shia ideology in the country under the pretext of charity organizations [20]. Looking at the structure and design in Iran after the 1979 revolution, it is evident that major strategies were put in place to ensure the propagation of Islam not only in Iran, middle east or Asia only but the whole world at large [7].

Against this background a ministry called “Ministry of culture and Islamic propagation” has taken upon itself the responsibility of propagating Islam (subtly). The ministry operates in several countries through the Iranian “cultural centers” that is within the Iranian embassies (Bar 21). Though Bar recounts that these tenets and functions added to the responsibilities of the embassies we found particularly active in the Muslim world, several literature reveal those activities can equally be found in the lesser dominated Muslim countries and even Africa states like Senegal, Nigeria and Sudan among others. All these seem to have been skipped by earlier writers of international relation theories.

However, contemporary writers and researches have deemed it necessarily to show the relevance of religion in today’s internal religions politics. To describe and explain occurrences and many intricate political issues of the 21st century, they note there is the need for something new. By “something new” they seek to explain that many 21st century issues and problems are related to religion. Religion which has been relegated and is not deemed crucial in the world politics [22]. With Iran taking much attention in world politics with its religious backed political dynamics, there is the need to take religious ideologies seriously in today’s world politics. Though like mentioned previously Iran has denied its foreign policy or diplomatic missions have interest in spreading the Shia ideology. The embassy and cultural consulate of Iran promote diplomatic relations between Ghana and Islamic republic of Iran on socio-cultural grounds. The claim that it is aiding in the spread of Shiism is not misplaced. This is because Shiism, since the Dynasty of Safavids in 1501 AD to contemporary times, is the official religion, civilization and the foundation of the political philosophy of the Islamic Republic.

Iran, through their organizations in diaspora have been promoting diplomatic relations between Ghana and Islamic Republic and through the tenets of soft power, which is characterized by the exchange of political, medical, economic, religious and cultural ideas. It can be noted also that several attempts in the name of aid, assistance and exchange of packages the soft power of the Islamic Republic increases. Iran appears to be exhausting all political avenues and consequently spread Shia ideology. According to Dumble, the Iranian consulate, embassy and other outfit aid immensely in the spread of the Shia ideology in Ghana.

He notes that four organizations of the Iranian government, from the broader perspective engaged in various activities with overlapping functions in spreading and promoting both the political and religious agenda of Iran in Ghana [16]. The Iranian Embassy, Cultural consulate, the Agriculture and Rural Development and the Iranian

Medical mission. These structures met a conducive environment for political co-operation in Ghana. The space was facilitated by a revolution in 1981 by the People's National Defense Council in Ghana. The positive political climate seemed to have provided the atmosphere for Shia influence in Ghana. There are several outlets through which the Shiite ideology spreads. All the outlets seem to have something small or a sort of link to the diplomatic missions.

6. The Role of Iranian Embassy & Cultural Consulate

The Iranian Embassy in Ghana was established in 1982. Upon the establishment, bilateral and cultural agreement ensured between the countries. The agreement aimed at the promotion of economic, political co-operation as well as cultural exchange. Dumbe notes that Shia religious ideas were deliberately interconnected with the cultural exchanges Iran promoted in Ghana. The consulate, aims at promoting cultural and religious relations, was established in the early 1980s. The institution did not only serve as a cultural bridge between the two countries but also strives to fulfil the religious agenda of Iran. Since the Iranian culture is overlapped with Islam, the lesser Muslim community was identified as partners in this cultural collaboration. This therefore paved way for the extension of the Shia religious view in the Muslim community. The formation of the Ghana-Iran permanent Joint commission for co-operation during the 1990s precipitated the receipt of some support in the areas of education, agriculture and health by Ghana.

In April 2013 Ghana signed a memorandum of understanding upon the visit of the Islamic Republic's former President, Ahmadinejad to promote bilateral co-operation between the two states in education, agriculture and tourism among other areas. Apart from the formal activities of the Iranian diplomatic mission, Shia groups have also provided services in theology, education, health and agriculture. Dumbe [16] observes that the cultural consulate's agenda to spread the Shia ideology and values to a large extent depend on the mode it adopts. The consulate unlike the Salafists whose religious ideology attracts the Western-educated Muslims provided employment for such Muslims. Deliberate acts of the consulate saw these Western-educated Muslims recruited to serve as a connection between the Muslims in Ghana and the diplomatic mission. He cites an example of a lecturer Shaikh Seebaway, a Muslim with Sufi orientation as instrumental in the initial establishment of the Iranian embassy and its initial activities. He was later appointed to work with the consular.

[15] also cites that the consulate collaborated with the center for development and management for ASRI schools (CDMA) solicited assistance in terms of literature and capacity building for some Shia basic schools from the Islamic Republic of Iran. In addition to that, in March 2013, three Iranian diplomats came from the Islamic republic of Iran. The mission of the three-member delegation was to train the teaching and the non-teaching staff in the Shia schools. The delegates did not only organize a three-day workshop for Mathematics and Science teachers from the basic schools but also donated logistics for teaching it. Initially around the time Iran was taking shape after the revolution, the consulate conscious of the Ghanaian political climate integrated its activities within the shared political revolution spirit of the two countries. A local journal was founded by the consulate. It was called the Revolutionary Review. This was a conscious effort to gain acceptability of the Shia ideology by the larger Ghanaian Muslim society.

These activities of the consulate can be equated to the fascists spread of fascism propaganda. Around the time, Mussolini was keen is spreading fascism in Europe, fascists movements were sponsored and documents of fascists ideology was spread through the diplomatic missions. Just like fascism, Shiism in Ghana was the ideology to be spread. Western-educated under the leadership of Seebaway Zakaria Armiya Shuaib and Abdul Salam Adam all with Western educational background, became editors and writers of articles of this journal. The magazine gave a platform for addressing issues of the consulate interest. The consulates agenda promulgated in the journal included matters of the relevance of Islamic sharia, Islam and modern education, bribery and corruption, the role of women in Islam [16].

Closely related to the above was the fascist formation of (CAUR) Comitato d' Azione per L'Universalita di Roma. It was spearheaded by Eugenio Coselschi in 1933, a nationalist poet and who had worked in various propaganda and cultural agencies. The aims of the Action Committee for the University of Rome was to coordinate and standardize the various fascist youth initiatives and act as the regimes propaganda agency for the spread of fascism abroad. Their activities included writing in a fascist style to spread the ideas of the fascism regime abroad. Looking at the two ideologies just like Marxism and Communism, there is a relentless effort to use mission abroad in spreading their ideology [23].

Dumbe observed that though the Ghanaian Muslims scholars who were writing for Iranian propaganda aren't Shiites, the articles they produced were heavily surrounded by the Shiite theological literature. The consulate extended much support to the writers and even sponsored the ideological writing to be published in national dailies such as the Ghanaian Times, and the weekly spectator. In the two national dailies issues, relevant to the consulate agenda were published. The writers further extended their write ups to respond to the polemics of other religious groups against Muslims in those platforms (national dailies and the Revolution Review). He writes that "The activities of the consulate were thus viewed as a cultural renaissance in Ghana, though they depended heavily on the skills of the Western-educated Muslim elites" [16].

This means that they used the Muslim elites to pursue the agenda of the consulate. Organized public lectures, commemorating events such as the Quds day, Ashura, the Islamic Revolution among others were organized.

7. The Islamic Revolution Commemoration

The anniversary celebration of the Iranian revolution had also exposed the Ghanaians and the Muslims especially to the political and cultural ideologies of the Shia. In February 2014 for instance, Ameen [15] notes, the presence of politicians such as the Speaker of Parliament and the Members of Parliament and Ministers of State. Some religious leaders as well as the larger Shiite sympathizers were present. The 35th anniversary celebration of the Iranian Revolution was at the residence of the Iranian ambassador in Accra. The speech made by the ambassador portrayed Imam Khomeini as a political and religious leader whose leadership aspirations must be emulated. A former minister of state, who doubled as the representative of the President remarked the ideological and economic benefits Ghana had gained from the Islamic Republic after Khomeini's Revolution. A guest speaker, Samia Nkrumah attempted to relate some political ideologies of Nkrumah, a pan Africanist and the first President of Ghana to the Iranian Revolutionist, Khomeini. Khomeini's character celebrated at the

events such as the Islamic Revolution celebration undoubtedly had exposed Ghanaians to the Shia political philosophy.

This political philosophy is based on the character of Khomeini and his “Vilayet faqih” legacy. Both his character and the legacy on the politics of Iranian state are embodiment of Shia Islam. During such programs, the celebration of the ideals of the revolution and the character of Imam Khomeini expose the audience to Shia ideology and Iranian culture and politics. Dumbé observe also that these events are organized to educate and showcase the relevance of the Iranian Revolution for emancipation of Muslims and its role to fight and barricade the Western culture influence of Muslim lands [16]. Esposito remarks that the much hidden key in the Iranian foreign policy is Shiism or Shia ideology. Eickelman also writes that the 1979 Iranian identified Shiism as its foreign policy [24].

Katzman [25] also stated that the ideology of Iran’s 1979 Islamic revolution continues to infuse the foreign policy of Iran. For him, the investment of ultimate power in a “Supreme leader” who doubles as a political and religious authority informs the state’s foreign policy direction. And according to [25] in the early years of the Islamic Republic’s revolution, Iran strived to export its revolution to the nearby Muslim states. Esposito adds that the export of revolution was not limited to immediate Muslim states but went down to even Africa with countries like Nigeria teaching the breeze of the revolution.

In countries like Sudan the impact of the Islamic Republic’s Revolution nearly caused another revolution. Esposito writes that

“its friends and foes agree that the Iranian revolution has had a major impact upon the Muslim world and the Iranian Revolution. For some it has been a source of inspiration and motivation. For others, revolutionary Iran has symbolized an ominous threat to the stability of the Middle-East and the security of the West because it has been associated with terrorism, hostage taking attacks on embassies and the promotion of revolutionary activities” [7].

This means that there were mixed feelings during the revolution. Some were inspired whilst others were agitated and disturbed. The West were equally afraid of the revolution as they saw values of illegal relevance that could be repeated or exported to their sovereign states. Exporting the revolution is not a claim but truly stated by the Islamic Republic of Iran from its earliest days to export of the revolution as a cornerstone of the state’s foreign policy [7].

Esposito mentions that the claim that Iranian revolution is narrowly sectarian is a common misconception. According to him the revolution even from its earliest days deliberately projected a global image, as Khomeini emphasized that the revolution has its spaces in the common tenet of Islam. Esposito quotes the 11th principle of the Iranian constitution which states that “The Islamic Republic of Iran is to base its overall policy on the coalition and unity of the Islamic nation. Furthermore, it should extend continuous efforts until political, economic and cultural unity is realized in the Islamic world” [7].

The aftermath of revolution witnessed many Islamic students’ activists irrespective of their sectarian affiliation

looking up to Iran as an example. Accordingly, he mentioned Khomeini's saying that the Islamic Republic wants Islam to spread everywhere and also ordered that if government submit and behave with the tenets of Islam Iran should support them but if they do the opposite, they should be fought without fear of anyone. [25] also relates that Iranian leaders appear to weigh the relative imperative of their revolution and religious ideology constantly against the demands of Iran's national interest.

Though in the initial years in the aftermath of the revolution so many deliberate attempts by the regime was to export the revolution, [25] mentions that in the late 1990s Iran gave up on the goal (of exporting) largely because promoting it succeeded only in producing resistance to Iran in the region. However, the role of the annual celebration of the Islamic revolution in reminding and drawing attention of the world towards the revolution as well as the Shia ideology cannot be ignored. This is largely because, during the celebration, the struggle of Khomeini in justifying an Islamic revolution and the political Islamic ideology disguised in "Vilayat faqih" as they are mentioned and discussed.

During these celebrations, the diplomatic corps endear the Shia ideology to the Muslims present They also portray and advocate the Iranian state's support to the Palestinians among other things. Holding these celebrations at the embassies have some remnants of spreading Shia Islam. Dumbénilly mentions that Iran turns to propagate Shia ideology through the diplomatic business in Iran embassies abroad. These diplomatic businesses and the Iranian embassies play a remarkable role in exporting revolution and spreading Shia ideology in the Western countries. Though celebrations of events such as the Islamic revolution the embassies and the other diplomatic representatives disseminate Islamic slogans as they support various Sunni movement organization. Bar observes that Iran propagate Islamic slogans such as Islamic unity claims to support Islamic courses like the Palestinian course. While supporting opponent movement, Sunni liberation movement such as Islamic Jihad in Palestine and Hamas, Iran seeks to polish its image as it promotes its model and spread Shia ideology among Sunnis [21]. Iran seems to invest human resources in ensuring it creates awareness of the larger Muslim Sunni community to the Shia ideology.

Already the revolution that happened in 1979 was fond and has been heard by so many Muslims across the globe. So, its annual celebration may make it more appealing and hence make people embrace the Shia ideology. Gambari observes that Khomeini's leadership and the idea behind the Islamic revolution touch responsive chords in the Islamic communities in Nigeria, more especially the downtrodden Muslims in the northern part of the country. Gambari cites an example of a Nigerian Islamic revivalist groups leader who in identifying with the Islamic revolution mentions that Iran is the only Islamic state in the world today which acts based on the Quran and the hadith. The leader reveals that the Ayatollah is also an outstanding figure who tirelessly works to realize the liberation of Masjid- al-Aqsa from the Jews in Jerusalem [7].

Same can be said about Ghana at the earlier stage of the aftermath of the revolution. A Ghanaian Muslim who joined Shia Islam reveals that, it was a constant repetition of Khomeini's name and his legacy on occasions like the celebration of Iranian revolution that attracted him to the Shiite ideology. Also, not only Khomeini but the Ayatollah system guided by the Vilayat Faqih gives him hope for the future of Islam [26].

A Shiite cleric who works at the consulate as the head of the government business and the founder of Al-Yaseen told the researcher that Ghana must look up to Iran in exemplifying what he calls pure self-government as preached by Khomeini. It is only when Ghana does that shall it realize its position as a relevant actor in the international umbrella of politics [27]. He relates the Khomeini's "neither east nor west" ideology to that of Nkrumah who neither looked at the West or East. The only difference is the fact that Khomeini adds that "our revolution is the movement of the oppressed; it is Islamic before belonging to any particular religion".

The cleric denies any effort by his outfit (i.e. The Iranian Consulate). In his own words

"My office is purely a diplomatic mission and we don't delve into issues relating to religion". Our main aim is to help and foster a good and sound bilateral relationship between the republic of Ghana and the Islamic Republic of Iran" [27]

However, in Sudan for instance, President AL Bashir accused Iran in January, 2016 for spreading Shiism just like Morocco and Comoros did. According to the President "Of course, there is evidence of their spreading Shiism in Sudan. We have done an entire study about their efforts not only in Sudan, but also in Africa. There are efforts to spread Shiism throughout Africa. There are Hawza (seminaries where Shiite clerics are trained) and Husseiniyas (Shiite place of worship and social gathering) and activities hosted by Iranian cultural centers such as panel discussions and lectures. Initially we thought of it purely as cultural, but then we discovered their attempts to attract youth and other demographics as part of a broader effort to promote Shiism". He added also "In Sudan we have enough problems. We don't need new ones." [28].

This accusation led to severing of the diplomatic relations of the two states in January 2016. Accusations by Khartoum that Iran is spreading Shiism had always been a source of tension between the two countries. In 2014 also, the Iranian cultural centers throughout the country were closed following the same accusation by the hosting country that the cultural centers were pursuing the agenda of propagating Shia ideology in the larger Sunni Muslim community [28]. Though, like Katzman mentioned, the Islamic Republic of Iran has constantly denied such allegations, hosting countries consistently seem to find evidence opposite their claim. Like I mentioned earlier, Morocco and Comoros severed ties with Iran due to the same accusation.

To an extent however it can be said it is difficult to separate the Shiite ideology from the Iranian political system and orientation, non-deliberate effort by the Islamic Republic to showcase some of its cultural traits may be thought to mean propagation of Shiism. In the same spectrum, Vilayet faqih setting the basis of the state's political philosophy and the Safavids dynasty conscious conversation of the Sunni territory in the 16th century inform the total lifestyle of the Iranian. They identify with Shiites everywhere in the world as a family. Their diplomatic mission may not refuse to assist a Shiite group or organization because they identify with them. A Shiite cleric mentioned to the researcher that Iranians in diaspora have considered him as a close relative ever since he revealed his religious identity to them (Shia religious identity). It is not only Iranians but also the Lebanese in the country who are Shiites [29]. In the same vein at the states level, Johnson writes that the main aim behind the support given by Iran to the Syrian Assad regime is the proximity of the Alawi Syrian government to the Shia ideology [30].

8. Conclusion

The Iranian mission in Ghana's and its contribution to the spread of Shiism was obvious from the beginning. This is because before the establishment of its embassy and the cultural consulate in Ghana, there was little or no knowledge of the Shiite ideology in the Ghanaian state. This made the early missions/ diplomatic corps involve in the direct spread of the Shiite doctrine following the Iranian revolution. Ameen finds that an Iranian diplomat, Hussein Kashani who came to Ghana to search for space to establish the Iranian embassy gave Shia literature to some Ghanaian Muslim students. A student among the recipients of the literature reverted to Shiism. The early activities of the Shiite diplomats were direct as they involved in organizing political programs targeted at indoctrinating the Muslims Shiism. Though those moves were partially unsuccessful but with the introduction of more Shiite institutions and activities sponsored by these diplomatic corps, the embassy and the cultural consulate seem to rather hide behind these institutions as they sponsor and empower them to continue the spread of Shiism. Also the Ghanaian state unlike other African states which saw the Iranian agenda as a threat to their political and religious orientation is showing more cooperation with the Islamic Republic as it signs more agreement to ensure economic development between the two states. If there is any hope for more Shia activities in the Ghanaian despite a strong resistant by other Islamic groups such as the Wahhabis, the good relations between the Islamic Republic and Ghana will be the reason. The Iranian diplomats have invested in education, agriculture, health and vocational programs in the Ghanaian state. The Ghanaian government has consistently shown more appreciation to Iran for their contribution and has even called upon Iran to invest more in the country. However, a careful look at the Iranian institutions reveals that they also serve as conduits for the spread of Shiism in Ghana.

References

- [1] J. Afary. "Iranian Revolution of 1978-79" <https://www.britannica.com/event/Iranian-Revolution-of-1978-1979>, July 12, 2017 [July 15, 2017]
- [2] B. January, *The Iranian Revolution*. Minneapolis: Twenty-First Century Books, 2008, p. 4
- [3] I. Salamey and Z. Othman, "Shia Revival and Welayat Al-Faqihin the Making of Iranian Foreign Policy," *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, vol. 12, no. 2, pp. 197–212, 2011
- [4] B. Moazami, *State, religion, and revolution in Iran, 1796 to the present*. New York, NY: Plagrave Macmillan, p. 120
- [5] W. L. Cleveland and M. P. Bunton, *A history of the modern Middle East*. Boulder: Westview Press, 2017, p. 427
- [6] J. P. Piscatori, *Islam in the political process*. Cambridge u.a.: Cambridge Univ. Pr., 1989, p. 165
- [7] J. L. Esposito, *The Iranian revolution: its global impact*. Miami: Florida International University Press, 1990, p. 22-60
- [8] F. Mirbaghari, "Shi'ism and Iran's Foreign Policy," *The Muslim World*, vol. 94, no. 4, pp. 555–563, 2004
- [9] E. P. Rakel, "Iranian Foreign Policy since the Iranian Islamic Revolution: 1979-2006," *Perspectives on Global Development and Technology*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 159–187, Jan. 2007
- [10] A. Karami. "Iranian cleric calls out Egypt's Al-Azhar for anti-Shiite activities"

- <https://www.almonitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/12/anti-shia-al-azhar-essay-competition>[Dec. 2, 2015]
- [11] F. Soltani and R. E. Amiri, “*Foreign Policy of Iran after Islamic Revolution*,” *Journal of Politics and Law*, vol. 3, no. 2, Feb. 2010
- [12] W. Buchta, *Who rules Iran?: the structure of power in the Islamic Republic*. Washington, D.C.: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2000, p. 46
- [13] F. Rajaei, *Islam and politics: Ayat-Allah Ruhollah Musavi Khomeyni's fundamental political ideas*. Ann Arbor, MI: Univ. Microfilms Internat., 1984
- [14] Ministry of Foreign Affairs Ghana, *Briefing on the Islamic Republic of Iran 2005* (unpublished)
- [15] M. Ameen. *Contribution of the Shi'ah Community to the Socio-Economic Development of Muslims in Ghana*. MPhil Thesis (University of Ghana Unpublished Thesis) (2015).
- [16] Y. Dumbe. *Transnational Contacts and Muslim Religious Orientation in Ghana*. PhD Thesis (University of Ghana Unpublished Thesis) ((2008)
- [17] R. P. Barston, *Modern diplomacy*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2014, p. 1
- [18] M. Leichtman, *Shi'i cosmopolitanisms in Africa: Lebanese migration and religious conversion in Senegal*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015, p. 40
- [19] *Morocco: Foreign Policy and Government Guide*. Washington, D.C.: International Business Publications, USA, 2007
- [20] “*Shiite Iranian Cultural And Political Invasion Of Tunisia ...*” [Online]
<http://www.trackpersia.com/shiite-iranian-cultural-and-political-invasion-of-tunisia/&p=DevEx,5066.1>.
[Accessed: 21-Jul-2017]
- [21] T. Juneau and S. Razavi, *Iranian Foreign Policy since 2001: alone in the world*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2013
- [22] V. Kubáľková, “Toward an International Political Theology,” *Religion in International Relations*, pp. 79–105, 2003
- [23] P. Morgan, *The fall of Mussolini: Italy, the Italians, and the Second World War*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 168
- [24] D. F. Eickelman and J. P. Piscatori, *Muslim politics: with a new preface by the authors*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004
- [25] K. Katzman, *Iran: U.S. concerns and policy*. Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, 2004
- [26] Yakub Yusuf, interviewed, 28th December 2016, Nsawam Eastern Region of Ghana
- [27] Sheikh Idris Toppoh, interviewed, 30th December 2016, Nsawam Eastern Region of Ghana
- [28] A. Majidiyar . *Sudanese President Accuses Iran of spreading Shiism in Africa*
<http://www.mideasti.org/content/io/sudanese-president-accuses-iran-spreading-shiism-africa> [Feb. 10, 2017]
- [29] Musharudeen Maiga, interviewed, 5th January 2017, Accra Ghana
- [30] S. Johnson, *Iran's influence in the Americas*. Washington, DC: Center for strategic and International Studies, 2012, p. 163